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SOME EARLY CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN TO AMERICAN EDUCATION

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As the first publicly supported state university to acquire national leadership, it is not surprising that other state universities have been greatly influenced by the experiences and the policies of the University of Michigan. It is also not surprising that the University of Michigan has exercised a profound influence on public education at all levels, from the early years of the elementary schools through the years of graduate work. This paper will be concerned with just a few of the better known contributions of our University to American education, with special reference to the period prior to 1900, as during this time the University of Michigan enjoyed a unique position as a pioneer in the field of public education.

One of the earliest contributions of the University involved the relationship of a higher institution to the state government. The struggle of the University to attain its independence of political interference was an important chapter in the early history of American higher education. Under the provisions of the first state constitution, that of 1835, the Legislature had complete control of the University. The Legislature could and did appoint regents and professors, establish departments, and frame general policies. Under this legislative control the University was not a success because of abuses arising from political interference in its administration. As a result, an early demand developed for a change in the law relating to the University and in the constitutional convention of 1850 steps were taken to place the University beyond political interference. It was feared that the University, if left to legislative control, might become a tool in the hands of the political party in control of the state government. It was therefore decided to make the governing board of the University a constitutional body and provision was made in the Constitution of 1850 for eight elected regents, two of whom were to be elected every two years. This new plan gave the Regents of the University a unique position; they became a coordinate, instead of subordinate, body in the state governmental structure. They had full responsibility for the University. The plan assured the University a consistent administrative and educational policy. Many times the authority of the Regents has been challenged, but the Supreme Court of Michigan has always supported their independence in administering the funds placed at the University's command and for formulating its basic policies.

The early success of the University in securing protection against political interference had a wholesome influence not only on the provisions made in other states for higher education but on the policies and practices of boards of education in school districts.

Whenever efforts have been made by politicians and pressure groups in Michigan or elsewhere to control educational institutions, the experience of the University of Michigan has been used to support the viewpoint that educational agencies should be controlled by educational objectives rather than the objectives that might be imposed by special-interest groups.

In the early years of its existence the University of Michigan was faced with perplexing financial difficulties. Practically all of its income in the first two decades was from the sale of lands, student fees, and gifts. In 1873 the so-called "mill tax" was authorized by the State Legislature. This was a unique arrangement for determining the income that the state would provide for the University. In the beginning it authorized setting aside the return from a tax of 1/20 of a mill on the assessed property of the state of Michigan. In later years the millage was increased, until eventually it became 85/100 of a mill. Under the mill tax the University was given a steady and continuous fixed income, the importance of which cannot be exaggerated. With a fixed income the University found it possible to assure faculty members a continuation of employment which made it easier for the University to attract and retain the services of eminent educators. It also made it possible for the University to look ahead and to make plans that would have been impossible without some assurance of a regular income. The success of the University in establishing its state support on a substantial basis represented a contribution that had real influence on the support of other educational agencies within Michigan as well as an influence on practice in other states. (When the state abandoned the state property tax, the Legislature found it necessary to abandon the mill tax plan for determining the University's income.)

In considering the financial support of the University it should be noted that the University of Michigan has been unique among publicly supported public institutions in the gifts received from alumni and friends. In fact, the University has been given more money and land than any other tax-supported higher institution in the United States. In a publication entitled "The Support of the University" prepared by Wilfred B. Shaw in 1934,* the following statements regarding private gifts to the University are made:

> Throughout the University's history--at least from the early years of Dr. Angell's administration, when the principle of state support became firmly established--it was recognized that without a certain amount of assistance from private sources the University could not properly fulfill its destiny. Increasingly the University looked to the State to sustain its immediate educational activities, the necessary classrooms and laboratories, the salaries of its executive and teaching force, and the other items incident to an expanding educational program. These, however, represented only the bare bones

of a properly supported institution of higher education. It came to be acknowledged that there are certain refinements in educational and social development in a large university which the State cannot be normally expected to supply--cultural facilities which have no immediate value in dollars and cents, items not susceptible of evaluation for the practical-minded taxpayer.

This distinction between what the State could be expected to provide and what might properly come through private gift was clearly stated by Professor Henry S. Frieze when he was serving as Acting President just before Dr. Angell came to the University. In his report for the year 1871 he said: "If the University is to be kept up to its present rank, it must find somewhere in this community its Lawrences, and Sheffields, its Thayers, McGraws and Cornells." Elsewhere, after stressing the need of the University, he asks, "How shall these great wants be met? How shall our financial basis be enlarged? Are we to look wholly to the State? The Legislature has promptly responded to our recent application for aid. It will undoubtedly be magnanimous in its treatment of the University hereafter. But can we fairly expect of the State alone that rapid accumulation of grants and endowments which will place us...on an equal financial footing with the wealthier universities and colleges?" *

Other state universities have benefited by the success of the University of Michigan in securing gifts. Some years ago the late Dr. Lotus D. Coffman, President of the University of Minnesota, told the writer that he believed that other state universities would eventually receive gifts similar to those provided by the friends of the University of Michigan. He was high in his praise of the success of the University in attracting such gifts, and expressed the opinion that this success would influence the alumni and friends of other universities to make similar contributions.

From the earliest days of the University's operation much thought was given to secondary education. The first effort to provide better programs of pre-college instruction led to the establishment of several branches where such instruction could be given. In fact, the establishment of eight schools to serve as preparatory institutions for the University was one of the first acts of the University after its location in Ann Arbor. These branches, located in Detroit, Pontiac, Niles, Monroe, White Pigeon, Tecumseh, Kalamazoo, and Romeo, were not only controlled but supported financially by the University. Additional branches without financial support were established at Mackinaw, Jackson, Utica, Ypsilanti, and Coldwater. In these preparatory schools the instruction necessary to begin freshman work in the University was given. Shortly after 1840, these schools were given over to the communities in which they were located, because it was found that it was difficult to finance the branches and at the same time develop the University. In a discussion of this early effort of the University to provide high school instruction in various parts of the State of Michigan, Burke Aaron Hinsdale has said:

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*Wilfred B. Shaw, Support of the University of Michigan, Univ. of Mich. Ann Arbor, 1934.

> The branches were not cut off a moment too soon. Had they been continued according to the original plan, they would have bled the University to death. At the same time they were, while they lasted, a probable benefit to the University, and an unquestionable benefit to the people of the state. It is hard to see where the University could have recruited its early Freshman classes, small as they were, without them. What is more, they prepared teachers for the common schools, augmented the educational interest of the state, and turned the attention of the people to the slowly growing institution at Ann Arbor. Strongly as the people were at first attached to the branches, they yielded them without a struggle. They had, in fact, done their work, and the time had come for them to give way to more efficient institutions. On the very page of history where we last meet the branches we first meet the Union Schools. The public high schools were henceforth to be the "branches" of the University."*

Because of its early support of high school education the University became an earnest advocate of the public high school. In no other North Central state do we find an early development of high schools comparable to that of Michigan. Private academies never gained a strong hold in Michigan in the early days because of the interest of the University and its leaders in the support of public high schools.

Shortly after 1870 the public high school was a subject of controversy at the meeting of the National Education Association, and representatives of the Eastern colleges and universities as well as the non-public colleges of the Middle West protested vigorously against the growing influence of the public high schools and urged the rehabilitation of private academies. Among those who defended the public high school was President James B. Angell of the University.

The University also contributed to the development of high schools when it provided for the admission of students without examination from those schools that had been approved by the University. This plan, known as the diploma plan of admission, was inaugurated under the administration of Dr. Henry S. Frieze, who was Acting President of the University from 1869 to 1871 just prior to the appointment of President Angell. The credit for developing the new plan should, however, go to President Angell. In 1914, when I joined the University staff as Inspector of High Schools, I had a short visit with President Angell during which he expressed his very genuine interest in the University's relationships with high schools. In this visit he also stated that he gave much personal attention in the early days to the University's relationships with high schools and wrote many personal letters to the administrative officers of schools.

For many years the University sent its representatives to visit high schools in other states, because of the desire of these schools to have their students admitted to the University without examination. These visitors went as far west as Colorado. As Inspector of Schools for the University I made the last visit to an out-of-state school and

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*Burke A. Hinsdale, History of the University of Michigan, p. 32. University Press, Ann Arbor, 1906.

advised that school to seek its accrediting through its own state university. In visits to educational meetings in southern states I have often heard the University of Michigan praised for its contribution to the development of secondary schools as well as for its contributions through the accrediting of high schools. It is difficult to overestimate the influence of the early example of the University of Michigan in establishing an intimate relationship with high schools at a time when these institutions were viewed with disfavor in conservative circles. Many of the states to the west and south followed the example of the University, and before 1900 most of the universities had developed a cooperative relationship with the schools.

The University also aided in improving college and high school relationships when President Angell supported a proposal of the Michigan Schoolmasters Club to create a regional association that would be concerned with the common problems of colleges and high schools. This proposal, adopted by the Michigan Schoolmasters Club in 1894, requested a meeting that would be concerned with the promotion of more friendly relations between colleges and secondary schools. The conference was called and President Angell played an influential part in organizing what is now the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. He was the first President of this Association. It is generally agreed that this Association has become one of the most powerful standardizing agencies in American education.

In the early period the University of Michigan took a decided stand on the need for the inclusion of science and other new studies in the college curriculum. During the first half of the nineteenth century the college curriculum consisted largely of courses in the classics, philosophy and mathematics. The growing interest of the American people in the sciences created serious problems for the colleges. A few of the older colleges attempted to meet the changed situation by creating "schools of science." In this way some colleges sought to retain their classical emphasis and give the traditional training to those students who wished to become ministers or scholars. The schools of science were designed to provide training for the students who were interested in the trades or industry. Before 1860 there were three such schools of science, at Yale, Harvard, and Dartmouth. When the University of Michigan was established more liberal provision was made for instruction in the sciences than was the usual practice in eastern colleges. When Dr. Henry Tappan became president of the University of Michigan in 1852, he had already published a treatise entitled "University Education" in which he outlined the essential features of a system of state-supported secular schools extending from the elementary level to the University.* While President Tappan favored continuing the study of the classics, he also favored instruction in other fields such as history, astronomy, chemistry, zoology, geology, and similar subjects. He believed that the college course should gradually be changed with increased emphasis on practical courses. He also favored the elective system in order that the student might have freedom to follow his scholarly interests. In advocating the program of change, President Tappan brought upon himself

*Henry P. Tappan, University Education, G. P. Putham's Sons, N.Y., 1851.

and upon the University of Michigan a flood of censure. It is reported that many newspapers of the state charged him with trying to "Prussianize" the Michigan school system, and criticized him for his"un-American doctrines and methods."

The fact that the University of Michigan under President Tappan's leadership joined with the so-called progressives of that day in supporting changes in the college curriculum had a profound influence on other state universities. R. Freeman Butts of Columbia University appraises President Tappan's work in the following statement:

> He /President Tappan/ thus helped to lay the theoretical foundations for the development of the Western state universities which were shaped, as we have seen, not only by the democratic and practical needs of the frontier, but also by the aristocratic and scholarly models of the German universities. Both influences tended to emphasize specialization rather than breadth in the student's college course, and hence both influences helped to pave the way for the widespread introduction of the elective system into the college curriculum.*

Because of its interest in science and scientific studies the University gave early consideration to instruction in the field of agriculture. In the Constitution of 1850 a provision was included that the Legislature should encourage the promotion of agricultural improvement. Shortly after the adoption of the new constitution the University organized an agricultural course and provided for the appointment of Reverend Charles Fox as Professor of Agriculture.

In an address at the State Fair in 1853 President Tappan discussed the function of the University:

> I say, Farmers of Michigan, that our great desire is to make the University useful to you, and we are determined to do it. We will educate all your sons who wish to be educated for the different professions. We will educate those who wish to take a particular course to fit them for a particular business. We will educate those who wish to become strictly literary and scientific men. And beyond all this, we have established and will carry on an Agricultural Department for those who intend to devote themselves particularly to Agriculture. Whatever be the determination of the people of this State with respect to an Agricultural School, we know not how to teach Chemistry, Botany, Mineralogy, and Zoology, without giving a course of Agricultural Science...Our aim is to make the University one of the first in our country, and, if we can, second to none in the world; and therefore, there is no branch of knowledge that we can lawfully omit.**

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*R. Freeman Butts, The College Charts Its Course, p. 155, McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1939.

**George L. Jackson, When the University Looked at Agriculture, in Univ. of Mich. School of Education Bulletin, v. 6, no. 7, p. 106, Ann Arbor, April, 1935.

At a later date the Regents invited either Ann Arbor or Ypsilanti to present the University with a farm to be used as a demonstration center for improved agricultural practices. Neither community provided the desired farm. In 1855 the Legislature authorized the establishment of an agricultural college "within ten miles of the state capital." This action proved an effective bar to the development of a Department of Agriculture in the University. It can doubtless be claimed, however, that the action of the University in recognizing the field of agriculture had an encouraging influence on the thinking of the people of Michigan regarding the importance of instruction and research in this field.

During the period of the fifties the issue was raised of transferring part or all of the Medical School to Detroit. It appears that some of the professors in the Medical School initiated the agitation because of their desire to live in Detroit. The Board of Regents appointed a committee to investigate this proposal and the majority of the Regents' committee recommended that the Medical School be continued in Ann Arbor. A minority urged that a large city could provide better facilities for a medical school than a small. In opposition to the proposal to move the Medical School, emphasis was placed on the desirability of keeping all branches or departments of the University in one place. President Tappan was strongly opposed to all proposals to divide or scatter the instructional units of the University.

This appears to be the last time that agitation to divide the University was given serious consideration, and the University has developed all of its departments in Ann Arbor. Some state universities have acceded to pressure to move professional schools to neighboring cities, but the University of Michigan has stood firm on the proposition that all departments should be in one place. The early decision of the University on this issue not only influenced development of the University of Michigan but has had an influence on other state universities.

The action of the University of Michigan in admitting women in 1870 aroused a great deal of comment. In a recent issue of the Ann Arbor News* attention was called to the early fears regarding the probable effects of the admission of women on the work of the University. Among other things the writer said:

> Co-education was regarded as such a calamitous proposal by some that they predicted University degrees would lose their value if women were permitted to enter, and the "alumni would burn up their diplomas." Eminent professors, it was prophesied, would refuse appointments to the University, and the institution would be heaped with ridicule. ...Not until January, 1870, however, were the sacred precincts opened to the "gentler sex" and the University embarked on one of the most disputed ventures of its history.

*Ann Arbor News, March 15, 1947.

The final resolution, passed on the proposal of Regent Willard, was approved only after prolonged circumlocutions on the part of the Regents, burying the disturbing issue in committees, and the unfailing persistence of "Miss Sarah E. Burger and other young ladies" who repeatedly harried the Regents with their requests for admission to the literary department, supporting their third application with petitions from 1,476 citizens of the state.

The fact that the University of Michigan, an institution of great prestige in 1870, provided for the admission of women had a marked influence on the practices of other universities, both public and private.

The University of Michigan took an early interest in the preparation of teachers for the public schools. In 1878 President Angell proposed the appointment of a non-resident instructor in Pedagogy, as it was called at that time. The Regents, however, went beyond his recommendation and in 1879 established a Chair in the Science and Art of Teaching. This was not the first professorship in the field of teacher training in the universities of the United States, as earlier provision for such instruction had been made in other universities, including Indiana and Iowa. The University of Michigan, however, holds first place among the universities from the point of view of the continuity of maintenance of instruction in the field of professional education. The early and consistent interest of the University in the preparation of teachers is a contribution of much significance.

In any list of the early contributions of the University of Michigan to education mention should be made of such facts as the following:

The first hospital controlled by a university medical school to serve instructional purposes as well as to serve the people of the state was established by the University in 1869. This experiment, as it was called at that time, led to a rapid expansion of medical instruction and placed the University of Michigan in a position of leadership in the development of a more scientific approach to medical education.

The first university courses in forestry were given at Michigan, 1881-1884. The first university courses in journalism were offered at Michigan by Professor F. N. Scott. The old chemical laboratory building, dating from 1857, was one of the first buildings devoted exclusively to science constructed on a college campus in the United States.

The first alumni organization was formed in 1845 at the time of the graduation of the first class for the Arts College. From that date the University took an active interest in maintaining its relationship with alumni. An all-university Alumni Association was organized in 1897 and a full-time alumni secretary was engaged. The University of Michigan was the first American higher institution to employ a full-time person to work with the alumni, but many other institutions soon followed our example. Much of the support of the University can be traced to its early concern about its relations with its graduates and former students. Because of the success of the University in its relations with its alumni, there developed much interest on the part of other universities in the early policies and practices of our Alumni Association.

In any review of the early contributions of the University of Michigan to American education mention should be made of the thousands of young men and young women who received training in the University and who contributed generously in scores of fields of human endeavor. It would take many pages to list the names of those who achieved distinction. Mention should also be made of the writing and research of members of the faculty. Much of the high quality of the University in its early days was due to the fine quality of scholarship of those who served as staff members. It would take several volumes to describe the writings and research of members of the faculty.

It is interesting to speculate on the sources of the early strength of the University of Michigan. In all probability, much of its strength could be traced to such facts as the following:-

1. The fact that the University was a pioneer among publicly supported higher institutions gave zest as well as freedom to its early undertakings.

2. The strategic location of the University within a few hundred miles of the majority of the people of the United States gave the University an early advantage over universities farther to the west.

3. The University benefited greatly from the remarkable genius of its three presidents in its formative period, Presidents Tappan, Haven, and Angell.

4. The stability given to the University by the constitutional provisions for its Board of Regents played an important part in its early development.

5. The University also benefited greatly from such developments as the following:

a) The unusual generosity of alumni and friends.
b) The cosmopolitan character of its student enrollment.
c) The great pride of the State of Michigan in its university.
d) The many contributions (financial and otherwise) of the citizens of Ann Arbor.

6. It might also be pointed out that the early willingness of the University to change plans and policies to meet new demands and changed conditions contributed much to its early development.

7. The fact that the University from its earliest days was unusually successful in attracting and retaining faculty members who were or became nationally known leaders in their fields of specialization contributed greatly to the early distinction of the University.

8. The fact that the University grew up in a state and a region where privately endowed colleges were not strongly entrenched.

9. It may be that some of its earlier strength could be traced to the willingness of its staff members to disagree violently on important issues.

The contributions of the University of Michigan to American education since 1900 have been numerous. In reviewing recent contributions one should take account of the fact that in the past fifty years the University of Michigan has become just one of several outstanding state universities, whereas in the fifty years following 1837 the University of Michigan had little competition in the field of state supported higher education. An individual or an institution that enjoys the advantages of being a pioneer can easily point to more contributions than could be made in a period when many individuals and institutions are at work in the same field. The University of Michigan is today a greater university than at any time in its history, but it is more difficult to identify its unique contributions to American education than in the pioneering period of its early history.

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Note:-

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